



Providing People with Spiritual Tools to Move Beyond Abuse



The Truth About Sex Abuse

**The term “sexual abuse” is more than words:
It’s real people and real pain.**

by Sallie Culbreth

Sexual abuse occurs when a person is sexually exploited by an older or more powerful person for the satisfaction of the abuser’s needs. The misused power can be either actual physical strength or perceived relational power. Sexual abuse can be verbal, visual, or physical. It can include physical contact (clothed or unclothed); actual penetration; oral/anal sex; fondling; genital exposure; sexually explicit speech; inappropriate sexual behavior toward a child/teen; showing pornography to a child/teen. It can be engaged in without consent or understanding of what “consent” is. Penetration **does not** have to occur for a person to be sexually abused.

Who is a sexually abused child?

- One out of three to four girls before age 18.
- One out of five to six boys before age 18.
- 67% of all substance abusers are sexual abuse survivors.
- In 90% of abuse cases, children know their abuser well.
- Family and family friends are the primary offenders.
- Family friends are more likely to offend with boys.
- Relatives are more likely to offend with girls.
- About 7% of sexually abused children are victimized by strangers.

Adult survivors of childhood sex abuse

By the time a survivor of childhood abuse reaches adulthood, a great deal of damage may have occurred. This damage often appears to be unrelated to the abuse. Problems that adult survivors experience often motivate them to seek spiritual direction and perhaps pastoral or professional help.

The problems or damage from abuse are called the “secondary issues” of abuse. Rarely do survivors seek help for the actual abuse. It is more common for them to seek help because of these secondary issues. At the heart of this is the unresolved damage that results from being abused. These secondary issues can threaten the stability of intimate relationships, the ability to appropriately parent, and the vulnerability required to establish a meaningful connection with God.

Many adult survivors are well into their late 20's before they realize they have problems. Often, by the time they seek help, their problems are complex, their relationships are troubled and they are in chaos. Their greatest need is to be understood, believed, accepted and respected.

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